

Nfld. & Labrador

COVID-19 reaches N.L. as 1st presumptive case announced

Patient recently returned from a cruise in the Caribbean

CBC News · Posted: Mar 14, 2020 9:19 AM NT | Last Updated: February 16



Janice Fitzgerald, the province's chief medical officer of health, says Newfoundland and Labrador now has its first presumptive case of COVID-19: a woman who recently returned from travel on a cruise ship. (Malone Mullin/CBC)

Newfoundland and Labrador has its first presumptive case of COVID-19, announced Dr. Janice Fitzgerald, the province's chief medical officer of health, announced Saturday evening.

Fitzgerald said the woman recently returned from travel on a cruise ship in the Caribbean and is self-isolating, and contact tracing has begun. She said the person has mild symptoms and is doing well, but could give no further details due to privacy concerns.

"Our public health officials continue to work very hard and are well-prepared," said Fitzgerald.

"We knew our province would eventually get cases and there are plans in place to respond."



“This is one case.... There is not a cause for alarm at this point.”

- Dr. Janice Fitzgerald

While concern about this new virus is understandable, Fitzgerald said, there is no need to panic.

"This is one case. Public health is doing its job.... There is not a cause for alarm at this point," she said.

"We're always concerned when we see this type of disease evolving, but our measures are in place and I think we can rely on those measures to find the cases."

Fitzgerald said 144 people in the province have been tested for COVID-19, and 67 have been confirmed negative, and results are forthcoming for the remaining people from the National Microbiology Lab in Manitoba.

She said 121 people in the province are currently in isolation.

Fitzgerald recommended avoiding all non-essential travel outside of Canada. Any travellers who arrive in the province from outside the country should self-isolate for 14 days.

Compensation for some private employees

The Executive Council and the Department of Finance, in a release Saturday evening, went a step further, and stated that anybody returning from out of country is required to self-isolate for two weeks, including children.

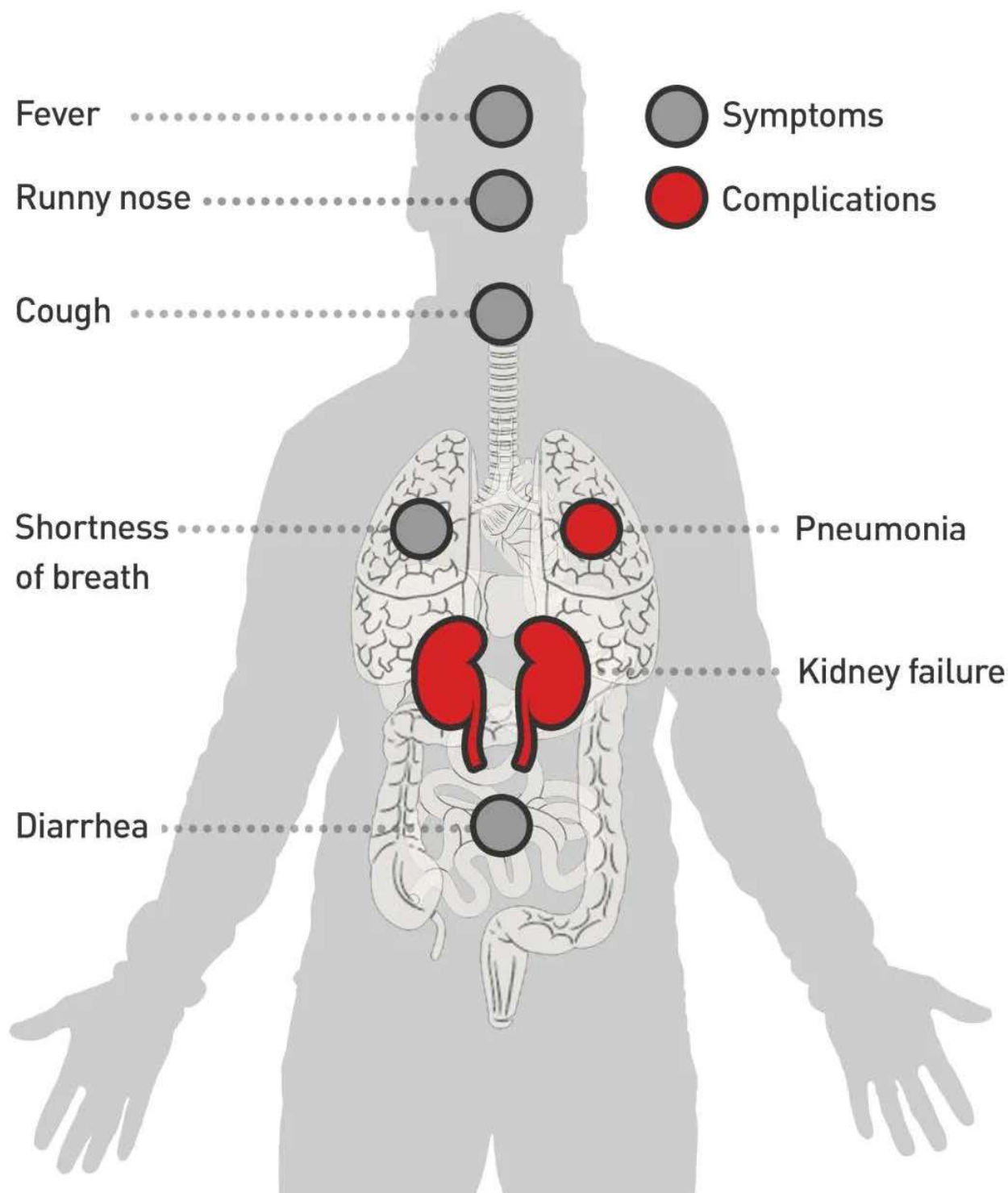
The province also said it will compensate private-sector employers "to ensure continuation of pay for employees affected by this decision."

Only those scheduled to return to work within that period will be compensated, the release said, while anyone travelling the country after today will not be eligible. Details are upcoming, officials said.

Anyone who has travelled and returned to work prior to today's announcement should continue working unless they begin showing symptoms.

Anyone experiencing symptoms of the disease, like fever, cough, difficulty breathing, should call 811 for further info.

Symptoms and complications





This graphic shows symptoms and potential complications of coronaviruses. (The Lancet/U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

"We have an opportunity to get ahead of this. We all have a role to play to protect ourselves and the most vulnerable people in our province and reduce the spread of COVID-19," said Fitzgerald.

"We must reduce and contain the number of people who are infected, doing so will help flatten the curve and help mitigate the impact on our population."

She recommended those who are abroad come home as soon as possible, as situations change in other countries and commercial flights may become limited.

Fitzgerald added that closing schools would not likely reduce the spread of COVID-19 at this point.

International passengers arrive at YYT

Prior to the announcement, hundreds of passengers were permitted to get off a diverted plane that was en route to Europe. They were placed at hotels in St. John's early Saturday morning.

The 340 passengers and 11 crew who got off the aircraft were screened by CBSA officers and ferried to their rooms. The plane is scheduled to leave at 8:10 p.m. Saturday from St. John's International Airport.

A spokesperson for the airport authority could not provide information on exactly how border agents determined the passengers were not infected.

TUI Airways 459, which was flying from Cancun to Birmingham, England, was diverted due to a non-COVID-19 related medical emergency, according to the airport authority.

Broad cancellations, closures

The incident occurred hours after the province issued sweeping directives arising from the COVID-19 outbreak.

Those led to a rash of cancellations from municipalities, businesses and event planners prior to Saturday's confirmed case.

Closures and postponements have mainly targeted events that can draw large groups of people together, such as hockey games or concerts.

- [Stay up to date on the latest cancellations and suspensions due to COVID-19 in Newfoundland and Labrador](#)

Amid the cluster of shuttered facilities, however, the St. John's Farmers' Market welcomed the public Saturday morning.

"We have to find such a balance here," said Pam Anstey, a spokesperson for the market co-op.

"This is a place that supports 172 small businesses."



Pam Anstey, spokesperson for the farmers market co-op in St. John's, said vendors will take a massive hit if they decide to cancel the twice-weekly markets. (Malone Mullin/CBC)

Anstey said the twice-weekly market is some vendors' sole source of income. Co-op leaders made the decision to open Saturday with that in mind, implementing strict sanitization regimens.

The province has recommended foregoing any event with more than 250 people.



The St. John's Farmers' Market made the call to stay open Saturday despite officials advising the cancellation of events over 250 people. A spokesperson said the economic impact of closing would be dire for the co-op and many of its vendors. (Malone Mullin/CBC)

Cities and towns on the northeast Avalon — including St. John's, Mount Pearl, Conception Bay South, Paradise and Torbay — have closed recreation facilities and halted many public meetings.

St. Patrick's celebrations curtailed

A number of St. Patrick's Day events have also been cancelled around the St. John's area, including many gigs for local musicians.

The cancellations come during one of the busiest periods of the year for many musicians in the city, adding to what has been a tough year, as a slow winter season was made worse by January's record blizzard.

"Paddy's Day for a regular pub musician is the highlight of the year," said musician Rowan Sherlock.



Rowan Sherlock has had two St. Patrick's Day gigs cancelled, with more expected to be cancelled. (Colleen Connors/CBC)

"Everybody's just kind of on the edge.... I don't want to be negative ... but realistically we are all waiting for that call."

Crystal Snow, one of the owners of Erin's Pub in St. John's, says the slowdown will be difficult for her business as well.

"We've had a hard winter. And it's always hard enough for small businesses," Snow said.

"It's already tough. Saint Paddy's Day is the day that allows people to catch up."

Snow said events at her pub will continue, however, as the capacity is well below the province's recommended limit of 250 people.

P.E.I. confirms 1st case

On Saturday, the Newfoundland and Labrador government [launched a new web page](#) to present COVID-19 information to the public as Atlantic provinces begin to see the virus rear its head.

Prince Edward Island announced its first confirmed case of the disease Saturday afternoon, while New Brunswick announced a new presumptive case Saturday, after the province's first confirmed case on Wednesday.

Federal Natural Resources Minister Seamus O'Regan, also the MP for St. John's South-Mount Pearl, tested negative for the disease Friday. He has been self-isolating in his home since Tuesday, and said he will continue to do so.

Seamus O'Regan Jr 

@SeamusORegan · [Follow](#)



My COVID-19 test has come back negative, thankfully.

I will continue to watch for symptoms — fever, a dry cough — and I urge everyone to do the same.

Take care of yourself.
Look out for one another.

7:41 PM · Mar 13, 2020 

 4.6K

 [See the latest COVID-19 information on Twitter](#)

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The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic on Wednesday, prompting jurisdictions — including Newfoundland and Labrador — to take action to limit the number of new infections that may occur.

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